

[The Village Coffeehouse]

208

Community

275 people without any great difficulty. Many of the buildings are rented by the
443 proprietors either from some owner who built them as an investment or
[427] from the community, which derives income from the structure. In a Mac-
edonian village of Kimine, twenty-four miles from Salonica, there are three
coffeehouses:

[403] All have adequate furniture, little tables and chairs being the standard coffee-
house equipment. All are fortunate to have battery radios also. . . . The larg-
est coffeehouse is a community building and is rented from the community.
Most of the village's middle-aged men frequent here. . . . The second coffee-
house is also rented, this time from a private owner. This coffeehouse is smaller
and much neater than the previous one. Here we usually find the old men of
the village, sitting around and quietly drinking and talking. The third coffee-
house is the meeting place of all the younger men in the village. This is a new
building, pleasant and big.*

275 The third type of coffeehouse, found much more frequently where urban
369 influences are strong, seldom sells ouzo and other alcoholic drinks, not be-
443 cause of any temperance drives, but because it caters to those who prefer
[522] coffee and an occasional sweet. This type is much more apt to be patronized
[273] by women, often in the company of a husband or father. Elsewhere in the
village or town will be found *tavernas*, where wine — often that produced
by the owner for his own clientele — is served in an outside courtyard with
food. Many travelers to Greece have commented on the moderate use of
alcoholic beverages in that country and have often pointed out that they
never saw more than one or two drunk people during their whole sojourn.

But all three types of coffeehouses — the combined variety shop, the
drink emporium, where liquor is served as well as coffee, and the urban
type where only coffee is served — are important for reasons other than
what is consumed. That is secondary, for many villagers visit a coffeehouse
without buying a single drink or sweet.

COFFEEHOUSE ATTRACTIONS

275 As I sat in scores of Greek coffeehouses I wondered, in looking around
521 me, why these particular men were present at this time and what the rest
● 208 of the village men were doing. I also tried to find out why certain men, per-
[571] haps five or six, were talking to each other around one table while another
five or six were in earnest conversation around another table. And here
and there I would find a smaller group of two or three seriously intent upon
some point of discussion. What formed the nucleus of each group? Did the
same people tend to cluster together each time they came to the coffee-
house? This was more than idle curiosity on my part, for I knew that the
answer to such questions would reveal a great deal about how public opin-
ion was formed in the village, opinion which in turn would be directly re-
lated to Greek national policy and even to Greek-American relations. In

The Village Coffeehouse

209

the Greek coffeehouses we find the equivalent of what Chester Bowles has referred to as the "tea house jury":

275

521

208

One evening in Taipei I asked a world-wise old Chinese diplomat what he thought would happen on the mainland. "Have you ever been to China?" he asked. When I said that I had not, he said, "In every one of China's one million villages is a tea house. Every day at the tea hour the people, especially, the wise people of the village, gather to talk.

"Chiang lost," the old man continued, "because this great 'tea house jury' decided that he had failed. The villagers came to believe that the Communists could do no worse, and they might be better.

"Someday perhaps the 'tea house jury' will bring a verdict against Mao. Then China will be ready for a change."

Although my study of the Greek coffeehouse never got beyond the introductory stage, I felt fortunate indeed to find that the investigation by John Photiadis of Stavroupolis in Macedonia had addressed itself to many of the specific questions in which I had been interested.* No one would claim that all of his findings for one village in Northern Greece would automatically apply to the whole country, but they do possess enough generality to provide some penetrating insight. For example, his discussion * of the coffeehouse attractions are most helpful.

275

521

The primary appeal is *kouvenda*, or conversation, explained as follows:

275

521

571

Kouvenda means conversation without any particular purpose, a recognized form of "passing the time." It is rarely desultory, or the mere exchange of ideas or description of events, or delving into the past in a quiet manner. But sometimes it is contrapuntal virtuosity, incisive, combative, loud, a statement or a question is countered by a challenging question, tact and gentleness have no part, insults are hurled, but within appropriate limits. A discussion is a battle of personal opinions, and its end is neither to reach truth nor to reach a conclusion; its end is sheer enjoyment of vigorous speech. But whatever impression this occupation of passing the time makes on someone who is a stranger to this custom, to these people it is their enjoyment. It constitutes one of the attractions that makes the coffeehouse a necessity for the villager.

Photiadis points out that during the *kouvenda* the participant is involved emotionally, is not only trying to prove his point but is also enjoying this oratory. The irresponsible statements are not to be taken seriously, although they sometimes are, with unfortunate consequences. In this connection, I was always interested in what the men argued about most in the village coffeehouses and found that they did not discuss politics to the same extent as the denizens of the urban coffeehouses. They preferred to talk about community affairs, crops, and personalities, although the announcement about some

[369]

* Relying on some of Dorothy Lee's analysis.

The Village Coffeehouse

211

ning or the very late hours are the times when the people pay most attention to the radio. During the busy evening hours it is very difficult to listen to or enjoy the radio because of the noise the participants make.

275
204
207

The different outsiders who stop by the coffeehouse, particularly the most central and attractive one, bring news and diversion. The bus driver, a government official en route to some other village, a commission merchant after agricultural products or livestock, a stray American tourist, are links with the larger society. Frequently, some offhand remark by one such stranger, because it has the ring of authority, influences the opinions of those present and thereby the opinions of others in the village who receive the information secondhand. Not to be overlooked, of course, is the eye-witness report some fellow villager brings back from the city or a provincial town where he has gone to arrange a business or legal matter. More often than not he can hardly wait to get to the coffeehouse so that he can hold the spotlight as long as he can stretch out the account of what he saw.

275
203
521
[208]

These attractions do not begin to exhaust all the possibilities. Anyone with business to transact arranges to meet the other party or parties at a coffeehouse. One may also go to the same place for a haircut. In Kimine, all three of the coffeehouses have what passes for a barber shop in one corner. Since there is no partitioning, the barber chair, mirror, and all tonorial activities are in full view of the coffeehouse patrons. The barber is particularly in his glory on Saturday and Sunday nights, when the coffeehouses are at their busiest. Likewise, in Anthili, in Central Greece, the three barbers there ply their trade in the coffeehouses, and so it is throughout most of rural Greece. Now and then one even comes across a singing barber who entertains when business is slack. Most coffeehouse proprietors consider him a prize asset.

275
305
443

[533]

THE COFFEEHOUSE CLIENTELE

But knowing what attracts the villagers to the coffeehouse does not tell us who is attracted and to what coffeehouses. Nor does it give us sufficient insight into the way community decisions are reached in the coffeehouse setting. For such information we need to take a closer look at the findings for Stavroupolis:

275
571
512

Ninety percent of the adult males of the village visit at least one of the seven coffeehouses from time to time. Almost all of these go at least 1-2 days a month throughout the year, with about four fifths going an average of at least 1-2 days a week.

More people go during the summer, but those who go during the winter go more often. Most people vary their frequency from winter to summer and those who change least are obviously those who go every day.

Most people spend at least an hour whenever they go to the coffeehouse, but

275

571

602

452

the relative upon whom he might need to call at a later date. Many men are careful to visit two or more shops from time to time "so as not to offend any of the proprietors." Also, as one informant put it, "The peasant comes from the field, washes up, goes for a drink to a coffeehouse where he might be tied by blood, but in order to do business he goes to other coffeehouses to find people with whom to arrange use of animals for plowing, etc., and will stop for a drink with these people."

275

571

573

Anyone trying to understand the sociology of Greek village life needs to pay special attention to these coffeehouse groups. First of all, the regular patrons of each coffeehouse can be viewed as a group whose members possess certain bonds in common. They have heard many of the same stories; they have learned to react in almost the same way to the buffoon, the over-important person, and the fellow villager constantly seeking sympathy. Although they may frequent a second coffeehouse, they are apt to feel a primary loyalty to their first choice and will find any number of reasons to justify their opinion that it is the best coffeehouse in the village.

275

573

609

242

This general group, however, most of the time is broken down into cliques, varying in size from two during the day to as many as seven persons by evening. Each group has its own informal leader. According to Photiadis: "The informal leader in the coffeehouse gives the other members of his clique group his advice and the satisfaction that they are associating with a person of higher status, while he has the satisfaction of performing his role, the dynamic aspect of his status, which is his reward." Therefore, when some outsider, such as an agricultural agent, approaches the farmers at a particular table, the informal leader considers him a rival. "The agent is a person of higher status who can talk about things the others cannot. This exclusive selling of ideas makes the informal leader feel that his authority is lowered in the eyes of his subordinates, and as a result, he fears that he will lose the satisfaction he has had." No wonder, then, that he is very likely to oppose the ideas which the agricultural agent is trying to advance.

275

573

521

● 208

203

Of special interest is the way news spreads from one clique to the next as part of the community-wide decision on some proposal new to the village. Photiadis takes as an illustration the use of a new insecticide which had been demonstrated by the agricultural agent to a number of farmers earlier in the day:

The cliques which have members who have seen the demonstration will start discussing the matter and, after a series of objections and agreements, they will probably reach a decision or have split decisions. The opinion of the informal leader during this discussion has a considerable influence on certain members.

Around the table of each clique there are usually one or more persons belonging to other cliques, or there are isolates sitting with the clique. These "isolates" . . . often move from table to table exchanging ideas or presenting the

The Village Coffeehouse

215

decision of the previous group as their own. The store owner and the waiter, who know everyone's business, present the opinion of the group on the matter while they are serving them. In this way the uninformed cliques are informed of the matter and the others have a new aspect of the topic for discussion if it differs from their own. Through this process, each clique's opinion diffuses through the coffeehouse. The rate of this diffusion varies according to the importance of the topic. If the subject is more important than usual, the leaders will find some means of discussing it among themselves, or a number of people may ask the opinion of informal leaders belonging to other cliques.

275
573
521
208
203

But the matter does not rest there. Many people move from one coffeehouse to another and introduce as their own the general consensus prevailing in the coffeehouse from which they have come. Thus, the men of the community tend to form a "public opinion" on a matter, frequently basing their decisions on either flimsy or inaccurate evidence. They prefer to be psychologically related to what others in their clique or coffeehouse think rather than to be individualistic and out of step with the rest. Truly, there is in Greece a "coffeehouse jury."

[626]

THE COFFEEHOUSE AS A MIXED BLESSING

The coffeehouse has its critics throughout Greece. Those responsible for improving the economic situation cite the economic disadvantages resulting from the unproductive expenditures at the coffeehouse as well as the many hours wasted there. This is recognized as a regional matter, for in many villages, such as those on Mount Pelion near Volos, one seldom sees people at the coffeehouse during the day. But in many of the mountain villages elsewhere, where economic opportunities are particularly lacking, more time is spent in such places.

275
461
[184]

Some oppose the coffeehouse on moral grounds. From time to time wives berate their husbands — not for economic inefficiency — but for drinking too much ouzo or for gambling away money that the family desperately needs. It also is said to corrupt youth. The nomarch of Thessalonike, Kostis Koukourides, pointed out: "The coffeehouses are our misfortune. I have two objections to them: the lost time and the bad habits of drinking and gambling. They also corrupt the youth, for in earlier times a boy had to be twenty-five years of age to go into the coffeehouse and would then never sit with the elders. Now he does so, which shows that he is losing respect for his elders."

Schoolteachers and agricultural-extension workers, although admitting that the coffeehouse can at times serve as a useful forum, generally think of it as a place where much misinformation spreads. It irritates an agricultural worker to think that he has persuaded a peasant to adopt some new farm practice only to learn the next day that the peasant has decided against it

[242]
[208]
[521]

275

461

242

208

521

because of a conversation the previous evening with his cronies at the coffeehouse. One villager got to the crux of the matter: "In the coffeehouse we get into arguments over our political leaders and don't attend to our fields. We do this because we are uneducated and people do little to help us, and so we spend our time on foolish things. The government doesn't send people here to instruct us; we are farming the way our fathers did."

With the spread of the program of agricultural extension, perhaps this peasant can no longer legitimately make the same complaint, but the chances are that the men of his village are still arguing about many matters and, perhaps in his opinion, spending their time on "foolish things."

[593]

Even the critics admit that there are still many conditions which encourage the men to patronize the coffeehouse quite apart from the attractions already described. For most village men, home is a most unattractive place in the evening. Dimly lit, poorly heated in cold weather, dominated by women and their silly prattle, the home cannot begin to compete with the masculine company found at the coffeehouse. Furthermore, most men can think up perfectly valid reasons (in their opinion, at least) for going to the coffeehouse: they have a business matter to talk over; they want to know how some world crisis is shaping up; they need some advice on a farming decision.

Should they be found at the coffeehouse during the daytime, when conscientious farmers might be finding something worthwhile to do, they do not experience many twinges of conscience. They are not pricked by any Puritan ethic that teaches them constantly to be busy; instead, they save their energies for the time and place where it is unquestionably in their interest to work hard and long. When no such occasion presents itself, what more could a man ask than to enjoy his leisure, unplanned and unsought though it be? Nor does he think that it is up to him to seek out productive uses of his time. If people have good employment opportunities, they will seek him out, and he will respond. If he is from the tobacco-growing districts, the chances are that he has put his only resources (wife and children) to work for him and can take his ease until he must return to see how the work has progressed. He has no idle capital to invest but does his best with the human labor at his command. When heavy work is required, he will do his part, but when that is done others can harvest, string, and manipulate the tobacco. He provides the entrepreneurial skill.

Perhaps the coffeehouse and the attitudes of its habitués clash more strongly with American value orientations than do any other aspects of village life. To the Greek peasant, to be idle is no sin; to converse in the kouventa can be as satisfying as to be a spectator sportsman; to seek to learn "what's new" if you live in a village is just as worthy as the search for novelty which motivates many in the United States. To get away from the women, the Greek peasant does not have to go on a long hunting trip to

Local Government

227

our way back to Athens the next day as evening began to fall, we saw Mount Parnassus, snow-topped, off to the west, and knew that beyond it lay Delphi and its sacred shrine. In an ancient land, peasants of today were still wrestling with the problem of hunger; and generous people — Greek officials, millers, truck owners and truck drivers, and supporters of the International Red Cross — were expressing a common humanity. Village presidents, or local government in action, were the final link between the outside world and those in need. 000

Other trips, however, left one in a different mood. In the Peloponnesos, as in many parts of Greece, I found villagers who did not feel very kindly toward their community president, even though they had elected him. In one place a peasant, not without a trace of prejudice, remarked: "My brother-in-law was president of the council when the village road was built. He and the council decided how many days men of the family had to contribute and we got the job done. But our president now is a poor type of political leader. He plays favorites. He does not promise anything for the village as a whole; he has no concern for a much-needed bridge at the place where your car almost got stuck crossing the stream." 746
625
735
622

In another village, an old man who had spent five years as a young man in the United States complained: "In community affairs we have to elect a president who is 'in keeping' with the government in power, or else we get left out. But many of our village presidents take revenge on those villagers who disagree with them. In the States, if you are a Democrat nobody cares." When I asked in what ways the president could take revenge, he said that the president could make unfair work assignments to a community voluntary-labor project, make unequal distribution of welfare goods, and create difficulties for a man trying to get a loan through the cooperative. 578
622
661
[653]

But in many ways the community council has some control over the president because it can outvote him on crucial issues. In fact, a council will frequently have real discussions since each member feels well informed on village matters, which is all they are supposed to discuss, and can reflect the ideas of his friends, followers, or his coffeehouse clique. As one Greek official said, "The community council is a lively element in village life. The only point to remember is that council members are not educated enough to measure up to their tasks." 622
623
[208]

Some brief insight into how this process works is found in the case of Stavroupolis, a village whose coffeehouses were treated at some length in the preceding chapter. According to John Photiadis:

Stavroupolis and the three other villages which form the Stavroupolis community are incorporated, with their government located in Stavroupolis. This government consists of an unpaid nine-member council elected by vote every four years, and a salaried mayor. For specific projects and activities, special committees are appointed from the council members and sometimes non-coun-

228

Community

622

623

[208]

cil members who are in some way connected with the project or activity. The mayor usually introduces topics for the approval of the council, but no action can be taken before the prefect of the area gives his final approval.

In Stavroupolis, people respond quite emotionally to each method applied by the village government. Problems are discussed by the council before decisions are made and are discussed again by the male population in the coffee-house with interest and emotion. . . . The village government's business is their business and these informally-made decisions are important since no project can operate normally or smoothly if their informal decisions are opposed.³

651

But no picture of local government is complete without some sketch of the tax and financial picture. According to the 1950-51 legislation, local governments gain their revenues from the following sources.⁴

Property Revenues

- For the use of slaughterhouses
- Grazing rights on communal-owned land

Dues and Excises

- Building dues, $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 percent of the amount of cost
- For the use of sidewalks, streets, and public squares
- Dues on hotels, beds, and bills
- Weight and measure excises; advertisement excises
- For the use of municipal and communal property, works and services including garbage and cleanliness, electricity and gas

Direct Taxes

- Tax on agricultural and forestry products: 2 percent mandatory, 4 percent optional
- Tax on cattle; tax on poultry and fish up to 3 percent of price
- Tax on vacant plots within town plan areas in demes over 20,000 and those in the capital area and Thessalonike area
- Tax on property which has gained value owing to deme or communal public works

Indirect Taxes

- Tax on sale and purchase of cattle
- Tax on olive oil dregs

Contributions

- Contributions determined by council not over 30 million drachmas per head in Athens, Piraeus, and Salonika; 15 million on other demes; 5 million in communes

[653]

Personal Work

- In demes and communes under 10,000 population, men over eighteen work ten days a year. Also includes their animals and motor equipment

Loans, Donations and Legacies

Sale of Real Estate and Movable Property

96 THE VILLAGE: AS A COMMUNITY

623 responsibility. The collection of its monies is undertaken by the central government's financial officers directed from Amphiklia, and the expenditure of its monies is supervised and controlled by the officers of the *nomarchia* centered in Levadhia. Moreover, the council has neither responsibility nor power over other village-wide activities. Law enforcement and the operation of the village school and of the village churches are administered separately both from the council and each from the others. Before turning to these activities, some mention of the council's role in Vasilika apart from the formal expectations is appropriate.

[829] It is indicative of the village attitude toward the council, in contrast with
[622] that toward the president, that at no time during our stay in the village was any man pointed out to us as having the status of council member or as having had it in the past. When, accompanied by several villagers, we visited the former schoolteacher of Vasilika, he asked us who was currently the president but did not ask about the council members. The president has an important role to play

622 in the minds of the villagers. He is expected to act as liaison between them and
829 other governmental units and to further the interests of Vasilika in whatever situations may develop. For example, there was some criticism of the president for not arranging more rapidly for the bus to come through the village. In

731 early April 1956, an unexpected and heavy rain flooded the fields and threatened
312 to destroy the wheat if the waters did not drain off quickly. Most of the vil-
lagers (not all, however) were agitated, and in the early morning groups of men
● 208 climbed the hill and looked out over the fields shaking their heads and lament-

521 ing, "Katastrofes!" "Catastrophy!" Then came the discussion of why the fields were not draining properly. All day, in the coffeehouse, the men inveighed against the English company which had owned the former Lake Copais land for setting up a drainage system that did not go beyond those lands; against the Greeks who took over the company for continuing a system that, the men insisted, not only did not drain the lands of Vasilika, but even made it subject to flooding; against the government for not having built a proposed dam that would have protected the region; and against the village president for not immediately calling on the nomarch's engineers to suggest remedies for the present situation. For days after, there were rumors that the nomarch's technical staff would meet with the president and councils of Parori and Vasilika to arrange a public works program of low dams to protect the area from possible future disasters from the same cause. The meeting never took place. Some villagers

731 blamed the situation on the unwillingness of the farmers to work together to
312 build their own small dams. One man had earlier tried to protect his own
208 fields by building low earthen dikes around them, but his work was wasted because the surrounding fields were not so protected. The morning after the storm some of the men had quickly built up a two-foot dam at an obviously vulnerable spot near the cemetery. But a villager pointed out that if the water had risen just a little further, the placement of the dam would have made the situation worse rather than better. There was no more rain; the waters gradually receded; each man watched for his own fields to dry out. Those who were left with one or two small plots that were so badly flooded as to be useless for

THE VILLAGE SCHOOL · 97

planting that season accepted the fact with resignation. The agitation died down after several days and the matter was not mentioned again.

Let us return now to the other officials and organizations that have responsibilities concerning the village as a whole. Law enforcement in Vasilika is in the hands of two *agbroflakes* (rural policemen). They are appointed by the nomarch and are responsible for preventing and detecting animal trespass in the fields and thefts of produce as well as of personal property. They also watch sales of cotton and tobacco and can therefore furnish information of value for estimating produce taxes. The village police are sometimes called in to deal with disorderly conduct or with any physical violence which threatens to become serious. The *agbroflakes* wear grey uniforms with green trim and are easily distinguished from the other villagers. Vasilika's police used to be *kzeni* (strangers) who came from two different neighboring villages, but in 1961 the men were natives of the village who were relatives of the then current president.

There are two other semigovernmental village-wide organizations: the agricultural cooperative credit society, and the welfare committee. The villagers elect a president of the credit society, whose signature is necessary on almost all requests for credit, since the Agricultural Bank works in conjunction with the cooperative. The village priest, the president of the council, and the president of the agricultural credit society constitute the welfare committee. They attest to the financial need of a villager who wishes to avail himself of free government welfare services. In most cases, however, the village families who occasionally need help receive irregular gifts of food and clothing from other village families, and their plight is not considered a matter for joint village action. When several cartons of surplus American butter, cheese, and powdered milk reached the village, it was the priest who distributed the goods. On that occasion, the daughter of one of the recipients brought some butter (which the villagers usually do not use in cooking or baking) to a neighbor's daughter, who contributed eggs, flour, and sugar. The two girls spent a busy afternoon mixing a cake according to a half-remembered recipe given them by an extension worker some years before. The cake was not a success by any standards for such confections, but the girls were satisfied because they had produced a European-style sweet.

The Village School

The village school is supervised and controlled by the Ministry of Education in Athens. The teacher is appointed by the ministry, which also prescribes the curriculum. In Vasilika, in 1955-1956, the school had thirty pupils distributed unevenly among the six grades. The first grade had the largest number of children because its ranks were augmented by the children of the shepherds, some of whom had had no previous schooling and were assigned to the first grade regardless of age. A man originally from the Peloponnesus taught the children. He had married a woman from Parori, who was herself one of the

104 THE VILLAGE: AS A COMMUNITY

621 tional activities, although ultimately controlled in Athens, function through dif-
631 ferent organizational channels. The unity that might be achieved by overlapping
personnel in a village as small as Vasilika is not, in fact, achieved because each
of the formal divisions has its own leadership. Some degree of concurrence exists,
however, as a result of the tendency for the leaders in each of these spheres,
except the governmental, to remain relatively permanent. The priest has been
the religious leader of the community for a generation, the former secretary of
the council had been in office for twenty years, the school teacher has been there
for ten years, and so on. Nevertheless, officials who want to persuade Vasilika's
• [208] population to some new course of action know that they cannot succeed by
persuading the formal leaders only, or even the influential older men only,
but must convince each head of a family, as well, if they are to get widespread
compliance.

621 It would seem as though the formal organization of the village, and
476 the family activities which so often lead out of the village and separate the
571 interests of each family from those of others in the settlement, prevent the
life-long daily associations of the men of the village from producing a driving
force for enthusiastic joint action for village-wide goals. Nor does the system
of voluntary, impermanent dyadic contracts between individuals produce any
large groups with a sense of solidarity. As the foregoing has shown, then, there
are activities which focus the attention of all the villagers but there is little
active village-wide cooperation for village enterprises.

621 Yet this situation seems to conflict with the professed attitude of
186 Vasilika's inhabitants toward their village and region. The villagers speak of
Vasilika in the way Greeks from other villages speak of their home communi-
ties. A man or woman's *patrida*, that is, his village of origin in this context
(*patrida* may mean Greece as one's nation of origin in contrast with other
nations), is always recommended as a place to visit. People frequently men-
tioned certain qualities of their home villages which were worthy of praise.
The air and the water, they would say, are clean, in the sense of pure and
sweet, and these characteristics, they thought, made the village a healthy place,
and, by extension, potentially therapeutic for anyone. The people of one's own
[609] village were *endoyi* (home folks) in contrast to *kieni* (strangers), and the
term *kieni* was used equally to refer to a man from Parori two miles away,
and to us from the United States thousands of miles distant.

186 *Kieni*, people not living in Vasilika, were described as thieves and as
609 inhospitable. We were consistently told to lock our automobile in other villages,
123 and also consistently told that it was not necessary to do so in Vasilika. Indeed,
685 both with respect to other villages and within Vasilika itself, a distrust of others
621 was most frequently expressed by saying that the villagers in question were
thieves, and it was an accusation not meant lightly. On two occasions before we
understood the situation, when we mislaid a pair of scissors and some clothes-
pins, we asked the family with which we lived whether any one of them had seen
the lost items. The family construed the question as an accusation that they had
stolen the items from us, and it took several hours of reassuring conversation
000 to convince them that we had meant nothing of the kind. Evidence suggests that

[Village Life]

12

COUNTRY AND PEOPLE

669 thoroughly in harmony with the "popular front" tactics inculcated by international Communist policy. When British intervention in 1944 prevented the resistance forces from seizing power in Greece, the rank and file of those who had supported the Communists during the war had little reason to distrust their leaders, since the Communists had not had time or opportunity to carry through the revolution they hoped for.

669 As a result, when in 1946 international Communist policy again mobilized the energies of the Greek Communist party to begin a new guerrilla war, Communist organizers found little difficulty in winning the sympathy and support of the same social groups that had participated in the wartime resistance movement. The hill villages were prepared to send their young men into the guerrilla ranks for the same reasons as before. Liberation had not brought prosperity, and without prosperity in the cities and plains, life in the hills was very hard. Hence the Communists found it easy to create guerrilla bands in all the mountainous regions of the country.

In the most obvious sense, both of these recent guerrilla movements failed. Their leaders were killed or driven from the country, and the government remained in other hands. Yet in another sense, it must be recognized that the imprint of the two guerrilla enterprises upon the attitudes of the hill villages of Greece has been deep, and seems likely to last a long time.

Basically, what the Communists achieved was to convince nearly everyone in the villages that the traditional way of living was no longer even to be wished for and striven after. Instead, they held out fascinating and quite unrealizable dreams of bathtubs and electric refrigerators for all. Or rather, they held this out as an ultimate goal, and offered in the more immediate future a life of activity, violence and dedication — a life that at least seemed to have significance and purpose and hope. These were just what the average young man or woman

[Village Life]

COUNTRY AND PEOPLE

13

in the hill villages (and in only slightly less degree the other young people of Greece also) lacked, yet desperately needed in order to confront the daily hardships and disappointments of private life. Here, I think, lay and continues to lie the secret of Communist influence in Greece. It was not so much the ultimate vision of wealth and ease and justice – Greek peasants are quite sophisticated enough to distrust such glittering baubles – but the mobilization of energies in the here and now to form a purposeful movement, surcharged with hope and optimism, that attracted the allegiance of so many restless young people.

At the least it seems correct to say that the guerrilla movements, with their attendant propaganda and real life experiences, created a population more or less chronically open to fresh revolutionary winds, from whatever direction they may blow. Even when jobs on roads and other sorts of construction opened up again in the 1950's, so that something resembling the old symbiosis of hill and plains could be resumed, the changed attitudes among the hillsmen remained quite obvious. Greece will have, for some considerable time to come, a substantial group of its population that is peculiarly receptive to movements of political dissent or outright revolution. [208] •

The real, physical problems presented by too many mouths and too little land have not been solved, and cannot be solved quickly by anything short of wholesale depopulation. But the tradition-bound attitudes which once made this precarious life seem inevitable, even if not right, have been profoundly eroded. Clearly, this is a dangerous and potentially explosive situation. What happens in the hill villages is likely to constitute the critical factor in the future political history of Greece.

The situation in the plains was different. Guerrilla bands seemed suspiciously like robbers, or at best like tax collectors, to the peasants of the plains villages from whom they demanded food. Comparatively few young men left such villages to join

[Town Life]

COUNTRY AND PEOPLE

21

sions, only to remember how precious a job is to every Greek, ⁴⁶⁶
and how impossible it is for a man to throw up a position in dis- ⁵⁵⁷
gust in the hope of finding another and better one. There are, ⁴⁷⁶
however, other factors which make the position of wage and
salary earners difficult, and foster chronic discontent among
them.

Wages are low, and are constantly in danger of being under- ⁴⁶⁴
cut by young men coming from the villages in search of work. ^[465]
Such new arrivals can often afford to work for less than a regu-
lar urban resident, for they have no homes or families to main-
tain, and can, in summer at least, sleep outdoors and eat very
little in order to save a small sum with which to return home in
the fall. As a result, a large part of the building trades, for ex-
ample, is in the hands of migrant labor. Unions can do little to ^[467]
improve wages or working conditions when dozens of appli-
cants seek every job that opens, and are ready, if need be, to
bid against one another in order to get employment at all. More- ⁵⁶⁵
over, the prestige accorded to white-collar work and to immu- ⁵⁷⁸
nity from manual toil obviously puts the working class at a psy- ⁶⁶⁹
chological disadvantage, and builds up a sense of grievance ^[554]
among those condemned to labor with their hands.

Like the hill villagers, the workingmen of the towns were
deeply infiltrated by Communist propaganda during the second ^[208]
world war. Attacks upon the rich, as traitors to the nation and
oppressors of the poor, won widespread response. And indeed,
the conduct of the small group of wealthy men in Greece lent
some color to the accusations which Communists launched
against them. Most men of property felt it more vital to safe-
guard their possessions than to join in any active resistance to
the German and Italian authorities. Many of them exhibited the ^[609]
same ruthlessness against everyone beyond the family circle
that most Greeks exhibit, and did so even when people were
actually starving in the streets, as they were in 1941. Acts of

/29 cont. /

leave school the second or third year and often with ill health. Two of the young men died from T. B. in Megali Vrisi. Both of them were in High School for two years.

Discipline. Besides the local school which plays /30/ a large part in discipline, the established morals of the village disciplines the youth. The part also of the grandparents and especially that of "Gerousia" is important. The most effective type and enforced one is through "Gerousia".

The stick at home and at school still has its blessings, since according to the philosophy of the villagers it came out of paradise. Even married men sometimes are subjected to this stick punishment by the parents without any complaint. The teacher keeps it on his desk and one corner of his office is filled with reserve sticks to use in case one breaks. When a teacher has 175 students of six grades, there is no time for explaining why and how, the stick enforces everything.

Political and Religious Training in the home. The political training is formed and reshaped in the coffee house. The convincing speakers and those that can read newspapers usually influence the rest. Coffee houses are places for recreation and the exchange of ideas, for forming political beliefs and for deciding important decisions for the community. Its function as a coffee drinking place is of minor importance.

The name does not mean very much to the average person who does not have experience of the coffee house. The number of coffee houses usually denotes the magnitude /31/ of the conflict groups and the amount of leisure time the farmers have. The coffee houses, besides being the place where one sips his coffee and plays his "tavli", are also centers for drinking from soft to strong alcoholic drinks. Quarrels, conflicts, political discussions and gambling take place in the coffee houses. With all these evils, still the coffee house is one of the best social centers, and centers where the common farmers exchange ideas and become aware of the current world political problems. It is the center

871
164

861
876
[626]
[623]

[593]

275
517
[208]
[867]

[578]

[578]
[525]
[208]

/31 cont. /

where thoughts are crystallized into action. Here the political leaders meet their followers.

Every stranger, merchant, peddler, politician, government employee, or any other agent, goes first to the coffee house where he can get reliable information and pass on his mission.

The Orthodox religion has been enforced upon the people directly from the church. The religion is taught at the school, and church ceremonies are conducted in the church. The whole family goes to the church every Sunday morning and thus the child follows the elders in their religious beliefs. The church through its numerous holidays teaches something new to the people, brings up the people to it through various ceremonies. The child /32/ learns from father and mother that this or that holiday has this or that moral meaning to their lives. The school as a part of its religious education obliges every student with the teacher to attend church on Sundays and holidays. The teacher or the priest on such holiday occasions explains to the people the religious significance of the day and its practical application to their lives. Their Christian religion is unlike the Christian religion of many other sects. The Orthodox church believes in one God and in Christ as his son, but according to the nature of their demands they pray to special designated saints whom they think are able to help them. For example, for rain they pray to St. Ilias, who rides in a carriage and makes the thunder. For war they pray to St. Demeter. For travel on sea they pray to St. Nicola. For having a child to St. Nufrios. For sickness to St. Spyridion, etc. down the line. It is not so simple as the Protestant religion, nor so simple as Protestantism in that it depends much more on ceremonials. They take their religion seriously and believe in it completely.

When a cow or a member of a family gets sick, or the crop is not as promising, either the priest or another person next to the priest will be called to offer prayer. /33/ The priest is the representative of the Saints through whom they communicate with God. Religion makes a large part of their activity and thus the youngsters as they grow, fit themselves in it and take their respective places.

275
517
[208]•
[203]

794
869
872
[796]

[796]
782
776
795

[771]

793
782
[776]
869